

The Rocky Hill Town Council held a special meeting on Monday, May 11, 2015 in the Council Chambers of Town Hall. Mayor Henry Vassel called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Those in attendance: Deputy Mayor Nadine Bell, Councilor Meg Casasanta, Councilor Guy Drapeau, Councilor Joe Kochanek, Councilor Frank Szeps and Councilor Cathy Vargas. Also present: Town Manager Guy Scaife and Finance Director John Mehr.

Those absent: Councilor Bill MacDonald and Councilor Tim Moriarty.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Mayor Vassel said he received an e-mail from Councilor Moriarty who said he could not make this evening's special meeting and Councilor MacDonald couldn't either but he wrote that he supports the budget.

Presentation – Update 2015/2016 Proposed Budget – Town Manager

Town Manager Scaife said there was some public attendance this evening and hopefully a lot of people were watching this on television. He referred to some goals they had many months ago as the set off on this effort. They didn't have a financial number in mind or a mill rate, etc. but they had three very significant things. The first thing was the overhauling of their budget process which he thinks was in need of updating. This process was simplified but it is more transparent and it dealt with the realities of a spending rate instead of just budget to budget. The second thing is accountability. This was with regards to him being accountable. This was also to make sure the department heads were very accountable in the spending of things that they do on a daily basis and the quarterly, monthly and year-end budget projections they were making. The department heads will be accountable for realistic projections as they go forward. The third thing was to bring a realistic number to the Town Council which reflects what their spending history has been in this current year and reflects what they have learned over the months in terms of State aid, etc., as well as an eye towards short term and long term. He said they believe they have met these three goals and he told the Town Council that he would be interested in having their feedback this evening. It is good news that they ended up with a flat mill rate and he thinks that they ended up where they are because of hard work by the Staff, of which many were in the audience now. He greatly appreciates the Staff's efforts and he said they worked tirelessly. He thinks they have come up with a solid plan going forward.

Town Manager Scaife gave his PowerPoint presentation at this point. (Please see the First Attachment.) At the end of his presentation, he said it certainly needs to be understood that there is a referendum coming in the fall. The major things that the public will be asked to consider are fire apparatus and major expenses to upgrade the RHPD. These are multi-million dollar projects and are kinds of things that wouldn't be handled in a budget. He thinks the Town has historically taken fire apparatus via a referendum. The Staff worked really hard recognizing that they will be going back to the voters for that money to ensure that they are being very frugal in the use of the money they have and the choices they make. The referendum will be spread over a

five year period. He said Finance Director Mehr has done the calculations as to what impact they will see with the referendum based on this being rolled in with some other funding probably. Town Manager Scaife said if there was to be no change other than just that then there will be a .15 mill rate impact. This is roughly \$30 on a house that has \$200,000 worth of value. He told them to keep in mind that this doesn't take into consideration what they are hoping will be a very healthy year of probably increased revenues and of Grand List improvement next year. They also had a year where the challenges to the last revaluation of the corporate world have gone through the system. Those challenges are worked out. They also won't have significant losses as a result of industrial and commercial companies going to court to challenge an assessment. He thinks next year will be very favorable and he assured everyone that the plan that has been put in place will look to a budget again next year where there will be small growth in it, if any. They haven't stockpiled things to load up next year. They have worked towards a plan here that sets a path toward a frugal future going forward.

Town Manager Scaife said he would be glad to answer any questions. Mayor Vasel asked the Councilors if they had any questions and none of them did.

Public Comment

Mayor Vasel asked if anyone from the public wished to speak. Rich Pawlich-Pagliccio, 8 Washington Street, R.H., said he is a former member of the Rocky Hill Town Council and he is a longtime resident. He commended everyone who was involved in the budget process and he said it is a very good budget. He mentioned how everyone should be commended any time that taxes can be held and services can still be provided.

Mayor Vasel asked if anyone else from the public wished to speak and there was no one else who wished to. He asked if there was any correspondence. Jo-Anne Booth read aloud and in full some correspondence that was addressed to Town Manager Scaife. (Please see the Second Attachment.) Mayor Vasel asked Town Manager Scaife if he wished to comment seeing that was addressed to him. Town Manager Scaife said he had received that e-mail this afternoon. This e-mail didn't specify any particular concerns across the overall budget. His first presentation of the budget was on March 16, 2015. He then presented it again on April 6, 2015, and on April 24, 2015. He also spoke to it verbally again last week, as well as this evening. He has had a tremendous amount of public feedback. Since March 16, 2015, the numbers have changed very little with the last change being one-tenth of a mill. From a municipal standpoint, nothing has been cut at all from what had been presented originally from a budget standpoint. There was some maneuvering to fund items out of this year's budget versus next year's but there were no cuts. The presentation on April 24, 2015 confirmed what had been presented on April 6, 2015.

There is no change on the bottom line for the school piece but just an adjustment on the surplus that the Bd of Ed had identified as to whether this would come out of Capital Improvements or their budget. He welcomed talking to any of the individuals who had sent that e-mail but to date, he has had extremely positive feedback. This is especially the fact that they are now taking actual spending rates into consideration as opposed to just looking budget to budget. A common

theme he has heard from numerous individuals is that they have really liked the process and they feel this has been more transparent than ever.

Mayor Vasel asked if there was any other correspondence and there was none.

Discussion and Possible Action – Adoption and Set Mill Rate – 2015/2016 Budget

Mayor Vasel asked if there was a motion.

Deputy Mayor Bell made a motion to approve the Resolution – Adoption of the 2015-2016 Annual Budget. The motion was seconded by Councilor Vargas and adopted unanimously by those present.

BE IT RESOLVED THAT for the fiscal year 2015-2016 General Fund Budget dated May 11, 2015, as itemized by department, board, committee, commission or other purpose and providing for total expenditures in the amount of \$68,566,648 with \$37,187,869 for the Board of Education, \$2,638,975 for Debt Retirement and \$28,739,804 for other departments, boards, committees, commissions, and other purposes of the Town of Rocky Hill, be and hereby is adopted, pursuant to Section 806 of the Town Charter.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT for the fiscal year 2015-2016 tax levy of the Town of Rocky Hill shall be established in the amount of \$58,954,735 and the tax rate upon the grand list of October 1, 2014 shall be \$29.7 per \$1,000 of taxable value.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT tax bills in the following amounts shall be due in one (1) installment on July 1, 2015.

Real Estate Tax Bills of \$300 or less
All Motor Vehicle Tax Bills
Personal Property Tax Bills of \$500 or less

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT all other tax bills shall be due in two (2) equal installments, payable without interest and/or penalty on July 1, 2015 and January 1, 2016.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT all motor vehicle and personal property tax bills in the amount of \$2.00 and under are hereby waived.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Town Manager is hereby authorized to secure bids for items approved in the budget subject to the provisions of the Charter.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Capital Improvement Program 2015-2016 through 2019-2020 be and hereby is adopted pursuant to Section 802 and 806 of the Town Charter.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Capital Improvement Program 2015-2016 through 2019-2020 is a forecast of capital expenditures and may be modified to meet changes in priorities that occur within the community over time.

Before this motion was voted on, Deputy Mayor Bell asked Mayor Vasel if she should read the list that was presented to the Town Council this evening. Deputy Mayor Bell then said she would summarize this list, which is basically the deletions (to the proposed annual budget) in the total amount of \$1,024,915. The updated proposed budget mill rate is 29.7. (Please see the Third Attachment.) She thanked Town Manager Scaife, Finance Director Mehr, the Bd of Ed Staff, the Department Heads and all of the Staff in Town for working on this budget and the new way of budgeting. Deputy Mayor Bell said she has been involved in Town government for sixteen years and this is the first time that this budget is actually based on expenditures that are necessary to run the Town government. This is as opposed to projections of what they might need. This budget isn't based on wants but it is based on needs. The budget has been "Right-Sized" as Town Manager Scaife has quoted. Deputy Mayor Bell said they have a budget in the end that addresses and funds many Capital projects (i.e. school building upgrades, security in the schools, projects in Elm Ridge Park, Police cruisers and much needed bridge and road enhancements, etc.). This budget enhances the level of service that the residents deserve for their tax dollars in addition to maintaining it. With All-Day Kindergarten, the SROs (Student Resource Officers), the ADA Challenger Field construction, enhanced building security, and the Rocky Hill High School renovation project (which has been much awaited), momentum will continue in the schools. Fixed increases for the schools and the Town amounted to \$1,800,000. This was mitigated through cost control, productivity improvements, improved financial management and the positive growth in their Grand List. She is pleased that they are able to provide a budget that accomplishes so much without any increase in the taxes to the residents. She will be supporting this budget as proposed for all of those reasons.

Councilor Vargas thanked Town Manager Scaife, Finance Director Mehr, Treasurer McKim, all of the Department Heads and all of the employees for their hard work, time and energy in putting this year's budget together. Councilor Vargas said this has been a year of change so far in recognizing the efficiencies in the way the Town offers its services and how it does business. These efficiencies and changes have been reflected in this year's budget in the process. It is their responsibility as Town Councilors to make sure that everyone is provided a healthy and safe Town to live in and that the funds necessary for a good education are provided, as well as that this gets done in a manner that is fiscally responsible. She feels this budget does just that. She is very happy that the Bd of Ed and the Town have both worked together to put a zero dollar tax increase budget through without affecting the excellent services that are provided to the Rocky Hill residents and the excellent education provided to Rocky Hill's children. She will be supporting the budget this evening for these reasons.

Councilor Kochanek commended and thanked Town Manager Scaife because he feels he has gotten in the right direction with this. Councilor Kochanek said this is the way this should be and he will support the budget.

Councilor Drapeau said he had no comment.

Councilor Casasanta also commended Town Manager Scaife for his eight months here already and she said he has done a fantastic job in listening to the Town Council. Councilor Casasanta said Town Manager Scaife listened to the Town Council's request to streamline the budget process and to work very closely with the Department Heads to ensure that they get a "Right-

Sized” budget. Councilor Casasanta thinks they have done that and she thinks the Rocky Hill taxpayers are very fortunate that they have a Town Manager who listens to the public as well. Councilor Casasanta thanked the public who have come out to weigh in and make comments about the budget because that has been very helpful. She also thanked her fellow Councilors for working very closely on this process together.

Councilor Szeps said he agreed with everything that has been said so he wasn’t going to repeat it. Their State is ready once again to realize a tax increase in many areas irresponsibly. He couldn’t and wouldn’t support a budget that would increase taxes at this time. Rocky Hill will be providing services to keep it safe and whole. He urged all of the Councilors to support this budget.

Mayor Vasel said he was going to repeat some of the things that were said because he thought they were that important. He thanked the Town Staff for their hard work in coming up with a zero tax increase. He also thanked Town Manager Scaife and Finance Director Mehr for all of their work on the budget. In six months, Mayor Vasel said that Town Manager Scaife has managed to decipher and identify many efficiency issues and also weaknesses in the previous budget. The overall Town budget has the following fixed increases for this coming fiscal year that are being negated through productivity improvements, improved financial management, cost control and a positive growth year in the Grand List. They are keeping Rocky Hill a desirable place to work and live in by holding the stable tax base. The fixed increases over the last year total \$1.8 Million. These include: (1.) Schools - \$801,000; (2.) Town - \$419,000; and (3.) Debt Service- \$580,000. The accomplishments, of which some were unfunded, but money has been found through Town Manager Scaife to fund them, include; (1.) All-Day Kindergarten; (2.) Security upgrades in the schools; (3.) SROs (School Resource Officers); (4.) Sprinklers at the schools; (5.) Enhanced parking at Griswold Middle School; (6.) Rocky Hill High School renovations; (7.) Carpeting at the Cora J. Belden Library; (8.) New Police cruisers; (9.) RHFD vans; (10.) Basketball court at Elm Ridge Park; (11.) The pool at Elm Ridge Park (has started to be funded); (12.) RHHS Track; (13.) RHPD impound yard; (14.) New Town-wide phone system; (15.) Welcomed Challenger Field at Elm Ridge Park; (16.) IT Director was hired; (17.) HR Director was hired; (18.) New roofs were put on RHFD HQ and on the Highway Department’s building.

Mayor Vasel said expenses must be reduced if they want sustainability and this is exactly what they have done. The Bd of Ed was applauded for identifying their surplus and passing their savings on to the Rocky Hill people. On behalf of the Town Council, he thanked all of the Rocky Hill residents for their support. They have taken their vision for the future of Rocky Hill with all of the accomplishments they have made and they have transformed it into reality.

At this point, the motion was voted on.

Adjournment

Councilor Vargas made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilor Casasanta and adopted unanimously by those present.

As there was no further discussion, the special meeting was adjourned at 7:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jo-Anne Booth